

Jealousy, Discontent, and Gratitude for Grace Baptist Church / 08.03.08

*\$5; \$2; 50¢; bags*3; apple; Stott book; water and cup; PPT; script*2*

Introduction

† **[Slide 1: Title only]** Good morning. My name is Will Groben.

- I have to admit, I am feeling a little pressure here this morning. My wife and I are in the process of becoming members of this church – have you voted on us yet? – well then, I will have to mind what I say, for it never pays to alienate the voters!
- I see we have our little children in with us today. That’s wonderful. LeeAnn and I have been married almost five and a half years now. We do not have any children yet. We were thinking about maybe praying about starting to talk about possibly having children, but the whole thing just freaked us out – especially after four years of youth ministry – so we’re leaving it up to God.
- I am one week away from completing my work for an MA in biblical studies from Dallas Theological Seminary, with tentative plans to go on for a higher degree. For right now, I am serving under Susan Gerhardt as a life groups coach and consultant...

† **[Slide 2: Truck]** Most important for our talk today, this, I would have you know, is my truck. It is a 1995 Nissan pickup.

- It is a humble truck, nothing special about it. A light truck, it has only a four cylinder engine and one-wheel drive. I tell all my friends in construction, with their full-sized trucks, that my hope is to someday own a truck with two-wheel drive; but this is good enough for now.
- It is a bit ugly, a bit small, but it has not broken down in the six or seven years I have owned it and even in the city it gets over twenty miles per gallon.

† I was content with my truck for a long time. But then, two years ago, something happened.

- **[Slide 3: Map]** Out of the seven other families on our street, five of them got new trucks. As I looked around at all those new trucks, with shiny paint and better looks, with all sorts of comfort features, with two or [gasp] four wheel drive... well, I began to feel a little jealous. I began to wish I had the money for a new truck. Going to seminary and doing volunteer ministry began to not look so good. God and I had a few talks about things around that time.

† **[Slide 4: Truck]** I got past those feelings and I became proud to drive such a humble vehicle.

- I decided it was important for a man of God to drive a humble vehicle: it shows good stewardship, a lack of consumerism, it must be good for some spiritual credit!
- I used to have a pastor friend who drove an old, ugly, little hatchback. I sent him an email one day, telling him I really respected that he had kept that old car, that it inspired me, that he was the kind of leader I could follow. He wrote right back and said he hoped it would not shatter my faith or diminish my respect for him, but he had just traded the car in on a minivan!
- His email shows me that I did not get rid of my jealousy: I had just masked it as something else.

† **[Slide 5: Title only]** Some of you might remember that I preached here last September, when David and Jared were in Mongolia. Back then, we took one short passage of scripture – Hebrews 10:24-25

– and we looked at it word by word to see what God had for us there. That is my favorite way to teach, I suppose, but today we are going to do something different.

- We are going to range around the New Testament to see what God has told us about the attitudes of jealousy and discontent, and we will find that these feelings come from a sense that God owes us something, and that the antidote to these feelings is gratitude.
- Before we start, we have to note that there is a good kind of jealousy in the Bible: God is said to be jealous for the hearts of his people [Exodus 20:5] or for his own good name [Ezekiel 39:25]; where Paul is said to be jealous that his converts not stray from Christ [2 Corinthians 11:2]; or where God is making the unbelieving Jews jealous of us, so they will accept Jesus as their Messiah [Romans 10:19; 11:11, 14]. But that is not the type of jealousy we are discussing today.

What is Jealousy?

- † We are talking about the kind of jealousy that leaves us feeling discontent, and we should begin by asking what the Bible has to say about this kind of jealousy.
- † **[Slide 6: Romans 13:13-14]** Scripture tells us first that jealousy is a form of lust.
 - In Romans 13:13-14 [NASB], Paul wrote, “Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to *its* lusts.”
 - We are lustful for what others have, that’s what we mean when we say we are jealous.
- † **[Slide 7: 1 Corinthians 3:3]** Scripture also describes jealousy as a symptom of underdeveloped spirituality.
 - Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 3:3, “For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?”
 - **[Slide 8: Romans 1:28-2:1 (not quoted)]** In Romans 1:28-2:1, Paul wrote that envy was one of the characteristics of the depraved and unregenerate. So, it is not an attractive characteristic, is it?
- † This poses a problem, for while we might acknowledge other negative feelings from time to time, not many of us like to admit that we feel jealous of others. We don’t even admit it to ourselves, do we? Most of us have feelings of jealousy... but we pretend they are something else.
- † Truth is, we don’t like others to do better than ourselves. Someone at work gets promoted and you don’t, someone at school is better looking or smarter, someone in your life group knows more about the Bible or is better at living it out, and you don’t like that person much because seeing that person makes you feel bad about yourself in contrast.
- † Jealousy easily becomes resentment as we try to justify our feelings. If you feel resentment toward anyone in your life, you should search your heart as to why: chances are, you will find some jealousy at the root of it. Maybe your resentment has grown to whole categories of people, so now you resent all wealthy people, famous actors, gifted singers, body builders, people with shiny new trucks...
- † It’s even worse if you ever had more before, and now you don’t, but someone else does... if you grew up in the country club but now are working class, if you used to be athletic or brilliant but now struggle with your health or a handicap, if you used to be popular but now are lonely...

- **[Slide 9: movie stars]** I used to be considered quite pretty. I'll tell you, in high school and college, I used to be compared to Tom Cruise, and now I am compared to Jason Statham! It's not quite the same, is it? I made LeeAnn watch a couple of old episodes of Kojak last month, so she could assure me that she found Telly Savalas to be an attractive man.
- † We look at a neighbor or friend or coworker who is doing better financially than ourselves, and we say, "If I had that much money, I wouldn't spend it like that!" Right? I know I have said that. But how much of that thought is an honest stewardship decision and how much is just jealousy because we think we *should* have that much money?
- † Maybe you say, "It's not fair that he earns more than I do when I work just as hard" or "It's not fair that she has a wealthy family and I have to work for everything" or "It's not fair that he is better looking or she is more intelligent or they were able to have children or he has a loving wife or she got lucky in the market..." But do we really want what is fair? Is the injustice of it what really bothers us?
- † I heard a former pastor, Jim Collins, talk about this once. He got us all wound up about the unfairness, the injustice, of life, and then he said he had good news! One time only, God was going to provide fairness and justice. Just show up in the middle of the parking lot of Robart's Arena tomorrow at noon, and God would give you exactly what you deserved!
 - Not many of us would go, would we? What we deserve, what is fair, what is just, is not merely a lightning bolt in the parking lot, but that we go to Hell for our sin.
- † Anyway, the problem is not that I want what is fair... what I want – what you want – is more!
- † **[Slide 10: bags of money]** Well, if you want more, I do have some good news for you! I want to reward some of you for coming to hear me speak today, so I brought in three bags of money. I need three volunteers... is there anyone here who wants a bag of money? See! You do want more!
 - [pick three]
 - [give bags away: first one has two \$5 bills; second one has one \$5 bill; third one has roll of pennies.]
 - You got fifty portraits of Abraham Lincoln, are you satisfied with that? They only got one or two portraits, but you got fifty... Do you think this is fair? [dismiss them].
- † When Andy Stanley did something similar in his church, he gave away a video iPod, a \$100 gift certificate to the Apple store, and an actual apple [have apple]. I had a smaller budget.
- † **[Slide 11: jealousy directed]** I hope you can still see the point of the illustration: God has blessed us all, some more than others.
 - Should the guy who got the roll of pennies be angry at the girl who got \$10? No, his complaint is with me, isn't it? I am the one who doled out the gifts. I could have given him the \$10 or at least the \$5, I chose to give him only fifty cents. If he is going to be angry, it should be with me.
 - Likewise, when we see others who are seemingly more blessed than we are, we should not let our feelings of jealousy show or allow our resentment to grow, instead we should take our feelings to God.
 - The problem is not that others have a new truck, it is that I want a new truck and God has not given it to me... the problem is not that this fellow has a full head of hair, it is that my hair fell

out and grew back on my back! If we are jealous or discontent, we must remember our complaint is with God.

- † It is interesting, but even when we get something as a gift, we sometimes are not content. You see, jealousy, or discontent, is a heart issue, not a circumstance issue. The problem is not that we really need something, but that we think God owes us something. We go to God and say, where's my truck? Why did you take my hair? Why can't I have more? Why can't I have what they have?
 - We think God ripped us off! He could have made us smarter or wealthier, prettier or healthier! He could have brought us more success and less pain, more glory and less shame. But he didn't.
 - Maybe he gave you fifty cents and someone else \$10, maybe he gave you an apple and someone else a video iPod.
- † Even if God gave us what we most want right now, we would still be discontent and jealous of someone else who got more. The problem is not that we have too little or that the other person got more, the problem is that we have corruption in our hearts.

Why is Jealousy a problem?

- † **[Slide 12: Mark 7:21-23]** In Mark 7:21-23 [NET], Jesus said, "For from within, out of the human heart, come evil ideas, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, evil, deceit, debauchery, envy, slander, pride, and folly. All these evils come from within and defile a person."
- † **[Slide 13: James 3:14-16]** Jesus' brother James wrote in 3:14-16 [NIV], "But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such 'wisdom' does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice."
- † **[Slide 14: 2 Corinthians 12:20-21 (not quoted)]** In 2 Corinthians 12:20-21, Paul came right out and called jealousy a sin.
- † Jealousy is an evil defilement, at best fleshly, but possibly demonic, bringing bad results in our lives, and at all times a sin. As sin, it corrupts us, it disillusion us, and it takes us away from intimacy with God and from the joy of life.
- † **[Slide 15: 1 Corinthians 13:4-7]** Jealousy also prevents us from loving. In 1 Corinthians 13:4 [NASB], Paul wrote, "Love is patient, love is kind *and* is not jealous...;"
- † We cannot love and envy at the same time. So we cannot love, cannot obey all the passages of the Bible that talk about loving each other, until we allow God to dredge up this muck in our hearts and heal us of it, so we can move past these deceptive and lustful thoughts, to see God clearly, to appreciate how blessed we are ourselves, and thus to be free to love others.
- † The worst part of this is that even if we get what we want, we will still be discontent. Powerful people covet more power, wealthy people covet more wealth. This is not a circumstance issue, jealousy, or discontent, is a heart issue. The answer is not to feed our yearnings, but to deal with our sin.

What is the antidote for Jealousy?

- † **[Slide 16: responses]** We should confess our jealousy to God and ask for his help in overcoming it [1 John 1:9]. We should talk to God about the root problem: that we do not have what we want. I should take my old truck, wood-frame house, bald head, ailing body, and lack of career path – my

whole big pile of discontentment – and take it to the only one who can do anything about it. God wants us to depend on him for blessing.

- We should submit to God, even when he says no [James 4:7], which is often with good reason. God requires our submission and trust. We bring to him our complaints and requests, but he might not grant what we want, and we have to accept that rather than taking matters into our own hands or turning our resentment toward others.
- We should confess our jealousy to those whom we trust and ask them to pray for us [James 5:16].
- We should make restitution to anyone we have harmed with our jealousy [Exodus 22:5-7]. That's an Old Testament concept, but there are New Testament examples of it. Andy Stanley interprets 1 John 1:9 to be not just confessing to God, but also to the one you harmed.

† By now some of you might admit to yourselves and to God, if not to others, that you have some jealousy or discontent, but even if you won't this next step is for you too. Just as we discipline our bodies to maintain physical health, we must discipline our soul or heart to maintain spiritual health. We do need to pray to God to change our hearts, but we also need to cooperate with God to break our destructive habits and form good new ones.

† **[Slide 17: Galatians 5:24-26]** We must learn to exercise both discipline and dependence; that is, we must crucify the flesh and walk by the Spirit. Right after describing the fruit of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit, Paul wrote in Galatians 5:24-26 [NASB], “Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another.”

- **[Slide 18: Stott quotation]** Speaking about this passage in Galatians, theologian and pastor John Stott said [339], crucifying our flesh or sinful nature is “an astonishing metaphor. For crucifixion was a horrible, brutal form of execution. Yet it illustrates graphically what our attitude to our fallen nature is to be. We are not to coddle or cuddle it, not to pamper or spoil it, not to give it any encouragement or even toleration. Instead, we are to be ruthlessly fierce in rejecting it, together with its desires.”
- We should put aside our jealousy, reminding ourselves that the problem is not that the other person has been blessed, but that we have not gotten what we want from God. We must face the truth about this. Only then can we begin to combat our discontent.
- As for walking by the Spirit, it is a matter of yielding to the Holy Spirit moment by moment, of submission to God's Word and the Spirit's prompt, of allowing and cooperating as the Holy Spirit transforms you to maturity in your faith and greater Christ-likeness.
- These practices might be uncomfortable at first, just like a new physical exercise program, but that is ok: stick with it and it will become easier and obviously beneficial.

† **[Slide 19: Stott cover]** I just read from John Stott's *The Cross of Christ*. I finished reading this book a couple of weeks ago.

- It is by far the best book I have read this year. It is deep and theological, but is also very readable and inspirational. There are far too many books available that are written for a popular audience but are not academically rigorous or theologically correct, and there are quite a few that are academically rigorous and theologically correct but entirely unreadable. But Stott has produced a masterpiece here, and I recommend it to you.
- **[Slide 20: Stott second quotation]** Here is what he says on p.238: “It is when we believe in Jesus Christ that our values change. We no longer conform to the world's values but find instead

that we are being transformed by our renewed mind which grasps and approves the will of God. And nothing weans us from worldliness like the cross of Christ.”

- † Reading this book, thinking each day about how badly I needed salvation, how badly Christ suffered to give it to me, all the grace God brought us through the cross of Christ, one thing that I have noticed is that I have a heightened sense of gratitude. If we are looking for a specific antidote to jealousy and discontent, I think it must be gratitude. We should cultivate thankfulness.
- † **[Slide 21: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18]** In 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, Paul wrote, “Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”
 - In everything give thanks: in all situations, not just when you get what you want. In fact, we should be thankful even when someone else gets what we want. We must celebrate all God’s goodness and provision, for this will free our heart of jealousy and protect our relationships.
 - When I struggle with feelings of jealousy or discontent, I find it helpful to pray thanks every morning for something I have received. I thank God, to praise him, but also to remind myself of his sovereignty and his abundant blessing in my life.
- † **[Slide 22: Philippians 4:6-8]** Paul also wrote Philippians 4:6-8: “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.”
 - Do not let what is missing in your life trouble you, be anxious for nothing
 - Rather, pray about it, ask for it, but also be thankful for what you have
 - And what is the result? peace! Peace that will help you guard your heart and mind.
 - Then a follow up command: let your mind dwell on what is true, honorable, right, pure... worthy of praise; in other words, do not dwell on the mundane, earthly, things, particularly for today’s teaching, the things you yearn for jealously.
 - For this reason, I stopped buying *Sarasota Magazine* and *Architectural Digest*. Seeing all those expensive cars, waterfront houses, and antique furniture caused me to feel jealous.
 - Dwell on things of God, not earth.
- † Returning to the things of God, to the cross, here are two more passages:
 - **[Slide 23: Colossians and Hebrews]** Colossians 2:6-7 [NIV]: “So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.”
 - Hebrews 12:28-29 [NIV]: “Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our ‘God is a consuming fire.’”
 - We said earlier that feelings of jealousy and discontent come down to the base thought that God owes us something. That is a terrible deception, isn’t it? Sure, there is a lot we could want, and there is nothing wrong with wanting it. But our desires and the frustration of not having those desires met must pale next to the gratitude we should feel for what God has given us in salvation.

- † **[Slide 24: blank]** I used to work as a bill collector in the inner city of Syracuse for one of those rent-to-own companies. When people didn't pay for four weeks in a row, I would go and try to get back the merchandise. I should have written a book about this experience, because it was on this job that I met the most fascinating people and had some of the strangest experiences of my life! I remember vividly one lady who indignantly told me, "I have a right to a television!" No you don't!
- † Granted, she was not born a Rockefeller, right? She lived in the inner city and was poor and was losing her television. But she had a roof over her head... she had the government providing her with enough money to buy food... she had furniture and clothes... she had her health, and even her inner city neighborhood was at least in the US, so she had freedom and better living conditions than anywhere else in the world. She had a lot to be grateful for, but instead, she was insisting she had a right to something more.
- † We might forgive her this attitude, but it is quite ugly when it appears in us, isn't it? Whatever our earthly circumstances, we know we are blessed beyond what we deserve. Maybe we each got the apple or fifty cents to buy an apple, but what an apple it is!
- † To bring us salvation, God had to satisfy his wrath and bring just punishment for sin, so Jesus, as part of the godhead, took on human form, lived a perfect life so as to be worthy, and then died to pay the price of our sins. Then God the Father raised him from the dead to prove his identity as the Son of God and promised Christ-Messiah and to prove that he had accomplished what was necessary with his sacrifice on the cross.
- † Think of what we get when we accept that sacrifice for ourselves! We are granted Christ's righteousness! reconciled with God! forgiven of our sins! born again and made alive spiritually! indwelt by the Holy Spirit! granted citizenship in Heaven! adopted into God's family! given a salvation from death and Hell that is sealed by the Holy Spirit! In this life, we are given the help of the Holy Spirit to become more like Christ, more like God intended us to be, we are given spiritual gifts to help others, we are given the fruit of the Spirit and guidance for life!
- † That's quite an apple! Let us be thankful! And let us be content... Let us choose to forgo jealousy and discontent, and turn away from earthly desires to focus on the Lord. Amen.